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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001070

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KPKO ASEC IV
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: EVENTS AND RHETORIC HEATING UP AS OCTOBER APPROACHES

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Events and rhetoric are heating up but proceeding largely as expected as October 31 approaches. The local press is reporting that the September 20 meeting in New York chaired by Secretary General Annan and attended by key African leader and all the key Ivoirian political leaders except President Gbagbo went no further than taking stock of the blockages in the peace process. Now, just as a year ago, ECOWAS (the Economic Union of West African States) and the AU (African Union) will move forward to devise proposed post-October transition arrangements for the Security Council to consider. Gbagbo is saying negotiations are finished, the UN has failed and he will soon propose his own peace plan. Meanwhile, opposition leaders are calling for all or most of Gbagbo's powers to be taken away after October, and are suggesting that the constitution should be suspended. Right now Gbagbo and the opposition have staked out positions very far apart from each other, but it is likely that in the end both sides will accept things that they previously categorically rejected. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Events are picking up speed but proceeding largely as expected as October 31 approaches, when the one-year extension of President Gbagbo's mandate will expire with elections nowhere in sight.

¶3. (C) According to local press reports, the September 20 meeting on Cote d'Ivoire in New York, chaired by Secretary General Annan and attended by several key African leaders and four out of five principal Ivoirian political leaders, went no further than taking stock of the blockages in the peace process. President Gbagbo did not attend, despite a last minute invitation from South African President Mbeki for Gbagbo to accompany him to New York in his aircraft. Instead, Gbagbo said in an interview with Le Monde that the UN's effort to solve Cote d'Ivoire's crisis has failed, the time for negotiations is finished, and he will soon announce his own peace plans.

¶4. (C) Even though some international press accounts described it as a failure, the outcome of the New York meeting was not a surprise. It was expected all along that this meeting would only set the stage for the Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union to devise a proposed way forward, just as happened a year ago. After that the Security Council would base its final decisions about the post-October transition on the ECOWAS/AU proposals. Indeed, according to local press reports, ECOWAS has now scheduled a meeting for October 4 to start this process moving. Without doubt, the AU Peace and Security Council will meet soon after that to consider the ECOWAS proposal. The Security Council meeting to discuss the Cote d'Ivoire post-October transition is reportedly scheduled for

October 17.

¶ 15. (C) Ivoirian political leaders are stepping up their public rhetoric on how that transition should look. The two main political opposition leaders, former President Bedie and former Prime Minister Ouattara, told the Ivoirian press from New York September 20 that the Ivoirian constitution should be suspended. Of the two, Bedie's announcement is more significant, because in the 2003 French-brokered peace talks leading up to the Linas-Marcoussis agreement, Ouattara and rebel leader Soro argued that the constitution should be suspended, while Bedie sided with President Gbagbo that it should not. From New York, Ouattara also said that after October 31 the Prime Minister should have complete executive power. Bedie did not go quite that far, but he said the Prime Minister should have much stronger powers including command over the armed forces. Rebel leader Soro publicly repeated his earlier rejection of any extension of President Gbagbo's term in office after October.

¶ 16. (C) Prime Minister Banny stayed behind in New York for a working lunch with ECOWAS leaders, according to press reports, to lobby them in advance of their October 4 meeting.

Meanwhile back in Abidjan, a group of Banny's political advisers met with POL/ECON Counselor September 19, at their request, to press hard for the international community to strengthen Banny's powers in the post-October transition. When asked, they did not say specifically what additional powers Banny wants, other than the ability to change Ivoirian law to expedite the ongoing process of registering undocumented Ivoirians and foreigners born in Cote d'Ivoire. However, they did say emphatically that the decisions of international organizations, which Cote d'Ivoire is, a member of -- i.e. ECOWAS, the AU and the UN -- should take

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legal precedence over the Ivoirian constitution.

¶ 17. (C) Also back in Abidjan, some 400 Young Patriot militia members marched (without incident) through the downtown streets September 20 to a rally in front of the Presidency, to declare their support for Gbagbo and the constitution. Gbagbo came out and mingled with the crowd, and took the occasion to repeat to local reporters that negotiations are finished (but he is still open to discussions) and that he will soon announce his own peace plan. Later in the day on Ivoirian TV, Gbagbo's press spokesman Desire Tagro was pressed hard to provide details of Gbagbo's plan but he refused.

¶ 18. (C) Comment. It is not hard to guess what Gbagbo's "peace plan" is likely to be: elections almost immediately, based on an updated version of the voters list from 2000; suspension of the identification process until after the elections, on the grounds that it is too time-consuming and politically controversial; and immediate and unconditional disarmament of the rebel FN (New Forces) and reunification of the country -- all "red flag" issues for the opposition. Whatever he proposes, clearly Gbagbo and the opposition have staked out positions very far apart from each other. However, it is entirely possible, even likely, that both sides will end up accepting things that they previously categorically rejected.

End Comment.

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